May 2003
Michigan School Readiness Program
Program Evaluation—Get Results!

We realize that program evaluation is a difficult topic. We acknowledge the important work that you are already doing in your programs to develop successful early learners and be accountable for their learning. The *Program Quality Assessment* (PQA) data from our statewide data set tells us that Michigan School Readiness programs (MSRP), on average, are of high quality in the services provided to children and families. We also recognize that early childhood programs across the country are being asked to "prove" that what they are doing "makes a difference." Therefore, using data to accurately report on what you do is vitally important.

Program evaluation is a way to determine whether or not programs have met the goals they set at the beginning of the year. The goals programs typically evaluate are the ones they write in the "Project Plan" section of their Implementation Plans. Program goals are important as they reflect a theory about how programs accomplish the primary mission of promoting preschool children's readiness for school and life success. We believe that programs help prepare children for school success by providing high-quality learning environments and encouraging parent involvement. There are three components to this theory that should be reflected in MSRP evaluations: program goals, parent involvement goals, and child development goals. Here is a sample of one program's appropriate goals:

- Goal 1: To promote children's growth in language and literacy development.
- Goal 2: To implement a high-quality early childhood curriculum that promotes literacy-rich environments.
- Goal 3: To provide parents with opportunities to learn about ways they can support children's literacy development at home.

In order to show that a program is effective, program evaluations require a look at the goals in the three areas at the end of the year to determine: Was there a change? Did children's language and literacy development increase? Did the program help increase parents' involvement in their children's literacy development? If your answer to these questions is "yes," then the next question is, "How do you know?" That is where your measurement strategies are important. We know we make a difference when we can show there was a measurable change over time. Here are some suggestions for comparing and measuring progress toward your goals:

Type of Goal	Comparison	Measurement Strategies
Child Development Goal	Compare children's development from the beginning of the year to end of the year.	On-going child assessment tool such as COR, Work Sampling, Creative Curriculum, or MLPP
Program Goal	Compare program quality from last year to this year.	*Program Quality Assessment* (PQA) data, teacher and parent surveys
Parent Involvement Goals	Compare parent involvement from last year to this year.	Parent Satisfaction survey, PQA, parent sign-in sheets

We had a chance to speak about this issue with Joanne Kelty, Director of Early Childhood and Early Literacy for Grand Rapids Public Schools and she agreed to share a process she and her staff undertook to write appropriate program goals and develop a program evaluation system.

First Steps

"As a result of the letter we received from our consultant at MDE urging us to revisit our goals, I looked at the goals we had, then clarified the three areas of program evaluation with Eileen Storer from the Michigan Department of Education. As a result of that conversation, I decided to organize a meeting with my staff to plan our goals and develop an evaluation plan. To prepare for this, I had to do a lot of collecting of data so the staff would have the information they needed. Then I set a meeting with the entire staff, which consisted of 60 people and included the teacher and assistant teaching teams."

Involving Staff in the Planning Process

"I have to say, prior to this, there were not a lot of opportunities for input by staff in writing our goals and outcomes. I think it was just assumed that the director would set those goals. Getting staff directly involved is really important because they play a key role in the education process so it is important for them to be involved in deciding what are our priorities. I found with my group of teachers that they really took the initiative in developing our plans. In fact, they were anxious at the end of the meeting to know if they were going to be involved again in the spring. I think they were excited that they would have input.

Prior to the meeting, I asked staff to sign up to be on a team that looked at program goals, parent involvement goals, or child development goals. By doing this, we were hoping to get a mixture of preschool center-based and elementary building-based preschool teachers to get a variety of perspectives. So we had one goal for each of the three groups with 20 people per group. I assigned a leader for each group and I floated among the three groups."

Child Development Goals

"The Child Outcomes group was given Work Sampling System data, which is the child assessment instrument we use in our program. The group looked at the data from last year and decided, based on that data and the district-wide literacy focus, that they wanted a focus on enhancing children's language and literacy development. The group also decided they wanted further information by disaggregating the data on the Language and Literacy portion of the Work Sampling System so they could specifically look at oral and written language. They decided which items on the Work Sampling System dealt with written and oral language, and set a goal to increase the level of proficiency on oral development (sections A1-C1) and writing development (sections C2-D3)."

Program Goals

"I had given the program group the PQA for last year to look at. They also used a report from the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation which provided summaries of each PQA item

and the percentage that scored a three or below for our individual program. The group reviewed those items and looked more closely at the ones that scored the lowest. There were at least three items that they deemed needed to be improved. They picked classroom labeling because we had scored overall pretty low in that area. The group read the definitions for a level four and five for that item in the PQA and developed a goal based on that description and strategized activities we could do during the year to accomplish that goal. Lastly, the group set a benchmark that the program would move from 51.9 percent scoring three or under to 35 percent for this year."

Parent Involvement Goals

"For the parent involvement group, we did not have as good data. I think we can get better. We had all parent involvement sign-in sheets such as forms for parent meetings and classroom volunteering. The group decided that we need to consolidate our data on parent involvement and that we should collect information on a monthly basis. They realized we had sign in sheets but no summary list of PI activities and so that became a goal I set for myself, which was to have summary list data pulled together for next year to assist the groups as they develop their plans. There was a large discussion about whether we just increase parents being there in the program or whether we should focus on getting parents to parent groups that emphasize a particular topic like literacy. In the end, there was agreement that we should first just focus on helping parents take advantage of our involvement activities. Then there was a discussion about the activities we would use that would get parents involved. The group generated a number of innovative ideas, which focused on setting up events where parents and their child were involved together and sending thank-you notes to parents for their participation. They generated a whole list of things that had been successful and added new ideas of what might work."

In conclusion…

Although program evaluation is a difficult and complex issue, at MDE, we believe that it will help showcase the good work that MSRP programs do. Joanne Kelty maintains that doing "data driven" evaluation is often "a hard process because it is not the way we as educators have traditionally done things." However, "we already keep a lot of data here. It's a matter of SHOWING that our work had an effect on the outcome; showing that we are helping our kids do better. And, in this climate with programs being cut, it really makes a difference if you can prove it."

We wish MSRP programs good luck with their program evaluations and remind you that in addition to your MDE consultant, there are many resources in the field to assist with their efforts. A few are listed below.

Joanne Kelty	Grand Rapids Public Schools	616-771-2950
Charles Smith	High/Scope Educational Research Foundation	734-485-2000